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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001985

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM PREF MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: TIGER LEADER'S HEROES DAY SPEECH JUST
SHORT OF A DECLARATION OF WAR

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In his annual "Great Heroes' Day" speech, Tamil Tiger chief Prabhakaran castigated successive Sri Lankan governments for failing to keep promises to present a viable plan to settle Sri Lanka's decades-old ethnic conflict. He declared the 2002 Cease-Fire Agreement "defunct," but stopped short of making an open declaration of war -- or even of independence. Still, Prabhakaran made it clear that that the armed struggle to create Tamil Eelam -- a homeland for his people -- would have priority over stalled peace efforts. He closed with an appeal for support from the international community and from the Tamil diaspora. In Embassy's view, it is significant that Prabhakaran's Tamil Tigers did not attempt a major blow against the Sri Lanka security forces before the speech. Since Prabhakaran did not announce the Tiger's withdrawal from the CFA, the door for a negotiated solution remains ajar -- but only by a crack. It will be critical to press the government to react to the speech by redoubling efforts to draft a viable settlement proposal, rather than take Prabhakaran's truculence as a signal to press again for the military victory over the Tigers that has eluded them for 23 years. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) LTTE supreme leader Prabhakaran delivered his annual "Great Heroes' Day" speech, as in the past two years, in a video studio and simulcast over the internet, rather than in public, because of fears of a GSL or "Karuna faction" assassination attempt. Prabhakaran claimed that after the LTTE's six-year commitment to the CFA, three administrations of Sinhalese leadership have failed to address Tamil rights. Prabhakaran accused the Rajapaksa government of "waging a propaganda campaign" to put diplomatic pressure on the European Union and Canada to ban the LTTE as a terrorist organization despite "the objection of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission." Referring obliquely to the Co-chairs (and specifically the U.S.), he added, "some countries that proclaim to be helping the peace efforts have failed to condemn genocidal attacks on our people" and "are also giving military and financial aid to the Sinhala regime to support

its war plans," thus "encouraging the Rajapaksa regime to carry on with its brutal military offensives with impunity."

¶3. (SBU) Calling the 2001 Ceasefire Agreement "defunct," Prabhakaran accused the GSL of waging military and economic war against the Tamils, and condemned the GSL for the closing of the Muhamalai checkpoint of the A9 highway linking the Jaffna peninsula to the rest of the island through the LTTE-controlled Vanni. He characterized the All-Party Conference, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and main opposition United National Party (UNP), and the Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights abuses, as transparent attempts to pacify the international community.

¶4. (SBU) Reiterating the LTTE claim to be the sole representative of Sri Lanka's Tamils, the LTTE leader concluded that the "uncompromising stance of Sinhala chauvinism" has left the Tigers with no choice but to resume the (assumedly military) struggle for a separate state. He asked the international community to "recognize our freedom struggle" and expressed gratitude to the leaders and people of Tamil Nadu for "voicing their support for our freedom struggle." He asked the Tamil Diaspora to "maintain their unwavering participation and support."

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Many observers had expected the Tigers to strike hard against the government in the days leading up to the speech to show they had not been weakened by GSL attacks. Possible

COLOMBO 00001985 002 OF 002

targets included military ones, including bases or military headquarters in the Colombo area, or "softer" ones such as VIPs. This did not happen. This might be a sign of continued Tiger restraint, but more likely of weakness that they did not want to give the GSL the pretext to launch even more intensive attacks. In any case, the fact is that the military balance does not favor the Tigers at the moment, despite some recent victories, notably, the successful defense of Tiger positions at the A-9 crossing point at Muhamalai against a government attack on October 11. The Tigers are under severe pressure in the East, and are in danger of losing their last toehold along the coast there.

¶6. (C): Prabhakaran's speech is probably just as significant for what it did not say. He did not declare the LTTE's withdrawal from the CFA, nor did he use the occasion to declare the independence of Tamil Eelam. Prabhakaran seemed to be aiming his message at the international community and the Tamil diaspora, even more than at his domestic audience. While his assessment of the CFA as "defunct" appears to put us back in situation before peace process began in 2000, Prabhakaran's description of the situation as "not peace, not war" may have left the door to talks open just a crack. We understand that the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission will attempt to clarify this with their LTTE interlocutors urgently. There is a significant danger, however, that Sinhalese hardliners like Army Commander Fonseka will feel emboldened now and pursue, unencumbered by the CFA, the military victory that has eluded them since LTTE violence began in 1983. We recommend the Departments of State and Defense use meetings with Fonseka to reiterate there can be no military solution and the need for restraint.

Embassy will do the same in Colombo. End comment.

BLAKE